

The Christian Life

PRAYER MEETING TOPICS

THE PARABLES.—"THE BARREN FIG TREE."

I The Parable. Luke 13:6-9.

a. Occasion, vs. 1-5. 1. This parable was to show those mentioned in v. 1, wherein they were as guilty as those slain.

b. Explanation. 1. The owner of the vineyard is God. 2. "The vineyard is the world. 3. "The fig tree" was the Jewish nation. (a) Today "the fig tree" is the Christian church, and also each Christian. John 15:5. 4. Christ is "the dresser" of the vineyard. John 5:22; Rom. 14:10; Eph. 5:23. (a) Christ is the intercessor as well as judge. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25.

II Lessons.

a. We are God's "fig trees" of whom he expects fruit. John 15:8. 1. Has God said of any of us, "Why cumbereth it the ground?"

b. Christ's teaching everywhere is that the end of those who will not bear fruit, whether in the church or out, is to be cut off. Heb. 6:4-12; Matt. 21:19.

c. Perhaps some of us are on trial now. 1. Christ may be digging around us, watering us with his mercies, nurturing us with blessings and trying to get us to bear fruit. Will we be fruitful, or will we be cut off and cast forth? John. 15:2.

J. L. GILLIN.

WORK

GEORGE S. GRIM

Work cannot be evaded without great spiritual loss, for work is the most searching method to try men's souls whether they are true to the task to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Christ's life among men was one of toil, and as a common occupation he worked with the poor and the outcast, but his labors were manifold and continued in succession, in word, in deed, and in habit, he identified himself with those who worked. Many of his most beautiful parables grew out of his familiarity with labors of the shepherd and the husbandman. Many of the deepest truths he gave to his disciples were made real in the emergency of working in the field and in the home. When he said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." He not only gave a divine sanction to work, but he also made it a part of divine life. The revelation of a working God brought a new conception of the divine nature into humanity which has made its profound signification clear into victory. The Almighty God at work carries with it the conception of God who is identified with that great movement of life in nature, in accomplishing the great end of mankind—which is work. The thought of God at work sheds a marvelous light and life in making history a continuous revelation to man of God's will and purpose. If men will only accept this unction of God and work out their soul's salvation with fear and trembling, then man and God will be co-workers together in this great

movement of light and life in the beauty of divine presence and order, then all humanity would receive their several blessings, and go home to their eternal rest, as when the Father had made man in the beginning and breathed in him the breath of life, and that he should toil and labor and eat his bread by the sweat of his face.

Louisville, Ohio.

SHORT SERMONS

Text: "And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Isa. 25:6.

It has always been the fashion in the world for rich men, kings, emperors, and in our country for societies, guilds, political parties, to celebrate great events by making a great feast, a banquet, where all the accessories of satisfaction and pleasure are provided in great abundance. Congenial guests surround the board, wine flows, revelry and rejoicing excites the company, and the utmost elevation of spirit is promoted by every possible method.

The blessings of the gospel are often compared to the objects to which men take the most delight, and in the above text we have a description of the entertainment which the Sovereign of the universe is preparing, or has already prepared, for his children and his friends. Great kings have made feasts, but none so great as this King of all the worlds. Splendid palaces have witnessed these entertainments given on a scale of indescribable magnificence, but no such palace as God's and no such magnificence as he is able to display. Alexander made a feast to nine thousand, but this is for "all people." A Chinese emperor used to prolong his banquets for one hundred and twenty days, but the Lord's banquet which he will spread for all people will last for all the ages.

The feasts of the world appeal for the most part to the lower nature, to the grossest appetites, and men gorge with the viands, and intoxicate themselves with the rich liquors. Witness a recent banquet in New York where for three thousand guests nearly five thousand quarts of costly wines were provided. They are more often than otherwise occasions of excess, in which the higher and better nature is debased by physical indulgence. Not so is the feast of the text. The language is symbolical. It is meant to set forth the great joy, the unspeakable rapture of those who shall be so blessed as to partake of it. Think a moment. It is given to the needy. How great is our longing for the peace and joy which the gospel alone can supply. This ancient gospel, this wine on the lees, well refined, what a feast it is to those who hunger for it. The maker of this great feast sent his messengers into the highways and byways to gather in the lame and the halt and the blind. That is the reason you and I are at the feast. How great was our destitution, our need. What beggars and tramps we were; nevertheless the Lord

gathers such to his feast. Their great need has moved His great pity, and while "the rich are sent empty away," the "poor have the gospel preached to them." Our poverty is our principle title to an invitation. The makers of the world's banquets do not invite the poor.

Again, let us correct our conceptions of the relative value of temporal and spiritual things. We are apt to forget that the blessings which the gospel offers are of the richest quality and of the highest value conceivable. We act as if it required us to give up a certain good for a doubtful and visionary one. This accounts for the eagerness with which men seek first the things of the world, regarding the kingdom as something to be sought after when there is nothing else to do, when all their temporal plans have been carried out. So many are deceived with the illusions of the material world. The unseen and eternal things do not appeal to them. That which they see and handle, and that alone, represents to them the idea of worth and value. It is this illusion against which spiritual teachers and preachers have to struggle. Men and women will always seek those things which to their way of thinking are desirable, tangible, worth having, which will conduce to their interests or happiness. To many the seen things are the only real things. The unseen is in the clouds, and partakes of the nature of clouds—unreal, vanishing, a dimness, a mist, a dream.

Lastly think of some of the most precious characteristics of that feast. It will be a feast of reconciliation, pardon, peace, love, joy, the feast given to returned and restored prodigals. Again it will be a feast of reunion. Think in whose company you will sit down at that table, and whose joy-lit faces will look into yours.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." Isa. 26:3.

The Author of this peace is God. It is a fact of common experience that our peace is affected by our associations. We may have such as will destroy peace, and we may have such as will contribute to our peace. But in the text we go to the Fountain Head of that "perfect peace" which can alone satisfy the soul. The mind of man cannot find rest unless it be in its Maker. We may have earthly riches and honors, so eagerly sought after, but these things so far from giving us peace often give us a greater unrest. They leave the heart devoid of enduring peace, because they do not remove that guilt and sin which destroys peace. How often are we startled with the dreadful spectacle of suicide among those who are temporally endowed above all their fellows. Riches, education, all the abounding comforts of the world, or as the phrase goes, "Everything that heart could wish," were not sufficient to keep them out of the bottomless pit of the utmost despair. In God alone can we find peace. Let us early learn that lesson, and